

# **COLUMBIA COUNTY EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY DIVE RESCUE & RECOVERY TEAM**

**Pamela P. Tucker, Director**



## **Standard Operating Procedure** **(SOP)**

**Revised June 13, 2000**

### **Purpose:**

- These procedures are established to provide basic guidelines to be followed by the members of the Columbia County Emergency Management Dive Rescue & Recovery Team, hereafter called the "Dive Team". The Dive Team is comprised of members that meet the training and physical requirements necessary to voluntarily perform duty as Underwater Recovery Specialists and boat operators.
- The Dive Team will conduct underwater searches for missing persons and/or perform forensic underwater searches for physical evidence within bodies of water located in Columbia County. Other duties include (but are not limited to) surface searches, ground searches, rescue and safety operations, and public safety demonstrations and presentations.
- The Dive Team also may be called upon to provide mutual aid to other governmental agencies where written agreements are in place.

## **Authority and Responsibility:**

### **CHAIN OF COMMAND**

*Columbia County Board of Commissioners*

*County Administrator*

*EMA Director*

*Dive Chief*

*Training Chief*

*Operations Supervisors*

*Public Information Officer*

*Divers*

*Support Personnel*

## **Responsibilities & Duties:**

**The Director of Emergency Management** - is appointed by the Director of the Georgia Emergency Management Agency upon nomination by the Columbia County Board of Commissioners and has overall responsibility for all areas of Emergency Management. EMA will provide administrative support to the dive team and oversee the operation to assure all aspects of this SOP are followed.

**The Dive Chief** - is appointed by the EMA Director, and is responsible for all water related activities, ensures that all divers and boat operators are physically fit and certified to perform effectively, schedules training for all members of the dive team, ensures that the dive equipment and the boats are operational and all necessary equipment is accounted for and functional, and maintains a current roster of the available "on call" divers. The Dive Chief should be qualified as an Operations Supervisor (as described below).

**The Training Chief** - is appointed by the EMA Director, and is responsible for coordinating both classroom and practical training missions on a routine basis. The Training Chief will work closely with the Dive Chief to assist in the evaluation of each new dive team member, as well as seasoned divers, on an on-going basis and report any concerns to the EMA Director. The Training Chief will serve as Incident Commander in the absence of the Dive Chief or until the Dive Chief arrives at the scene.

**The Operations Supervisors** - are appointed by the Director, after consulting with the Dive Chief and Training Chief. The senior Operations Supervisor at the scene will serve as the Incident Commander in the absence of the Dive Chief or the Training Chief or their arrival at the scene. Appointment as Operations Supervisor is made with due consideration of leadership training, experience and dive education. Operations Supervisors will assume

command of a scene as the needs of an in water situation dictate. (There will be three Operations Supervisors, ranked Level I, Level II, and Level III.)

**Public Information Officer** - is appointed by the EMA Director and will provide on-scene information to the news media and family members. Additionally, the PIO will develop a system of communication for the team members and outside emergency service agencies, via a newsletter.

**Support Personnel** – are appointed by the EMA Director, after consulting with the Dive Chief following a satisfactorily completed six-month probation period. Support Personnel must be familiar with proper procedures in boat handling and operations, as well as Dive Team operating procedures.

## **Training Requirements:**

- **Divers:** All Divers must be certified by a nationally recognized SCUBA training agency. As members of the Team, divers will adhere to the philosophy that "*A good diver is always training*". In keeping with this philosophy, divers should attain a minimum certification level of Rescue Diver (or equivalent) and have additional training in Search & Recovery and Night Diver; and should have at least one "overhead environment" course (Wreck Diver). Additionally, all divers must complete a "boating safety" course within six months of becoming a member of the team and have a full understanding of the operational standards and procedures for any boat used by the dive team.
- Persons who wish to join the Team as a diver must demonstrate skills during a Team training exercise and provide access to their log book and copies of their certification cards. Divers must provide their own equipment for calls. After a background check, the diver will be voted on by the team and approved by the EMA Director for a six-month probation period.
- New Dive Team members must participate in dive training activities that includes: Review of our Search & Recovery Operations & Procedures and training dives that include both the Circle and the Stay-jack patterns prior to joining the dive team. Additionally, dive team members that have been certified for less than six months and inexperienced divers will serve a three month probation period before participating in any water related event, except training missions. At the end of the three-month period, the Dive Chief and Training Chief will make a recommendation to end probation or extend it for a longer period of time to assure diver readiness for response.
- Non-team Divers may dive with the Dive Team at the discretion of the Dive Chief for purposes of training or to fulfill an emergency need.
- Training activities for the Dive Team will be scheduled bi-monthly. Members should dive at least monthly to insure maintenance of general diver skills.

The Dive Chief, Training Chief, Supervisors, Divers, and Support Personnel's membership on the Dive Team is at the discretion of the EMA Director. Members of the team are entitled to fair and equal treatment. Problems within the team should be addressed and dealt with in an organized fashion. Members should first report any issue to the Dive Chief. Please note: members have the right at any time to contact the EMA director with any problem. The issue will be discussed and if the EMA Director deems it necessary, will be discussed with certain team members or the team as a whole. The EMA Director shall make the final determination on any such issue. Team meetings will be held to resolve the issues. **Failure to maintain training activities and physical condition shall be grounds for dismissal.**

### **Insurance Coverage:**

All EMA Dive Team Volunteers will be covered by the Columbia County Workers' Compensation Plan. (Deleted extra insurance coverage. All members will be covered by the ACCG insurance program with the County).

### **Mandatory Requirements:**

**Background Check** - Each candidate shall consent to a background check. This check will reveal criminal and traffic records. More than one traffic violation in a three year period, any criminal conviction (other than a traffic violation), and any other inappropriate behavior is grounds for dismissal.

**Medical History** - Medical information may be crucial if a Team member is involved in an accident while with the Dive Team. The attached Medical Form will be completed by each Team member and updated annually or anytime there is a change in the information on the form. Medical information is kept confidential and is regulated by the EMA office.

**Vaccinations** - Team members may be exposed to possible disease and contamination. To prevent any mishap, members should have the Hepatitis B Series vaccination. Additionally, all divers must insure their Tetanus vaccination is current.

### **Meetings and Training:**

**Dive Team Meetings** - will be called by the EMA Director or Dive Chief as needed. All members will be notified in writing of the meeting location, date, and time, and are expected to attend when meetings are called.

**Training Activities** - will be scheduled on a bi-monthly basis. Scheduling will be flexible to facilitate the greatest number of participants possible. Training dives are important and Team Members will attend all training sessions unless excused by the Dive Chief or Training Chief.

**Educational Activities** - are held throughout the year at a variety of locations around the community. Attendance for these events is important for public recognition and educational purposes. The PIO will coordinate these activities.

### **Professional Image:**

- Strict professional procedures will be adhered to when joining the team. When a member responds to a call or activity, that member will conduct himself or herself in an orderly and professional manner. Actions and presentation of the team will cast an image to our community through media and word-of-mouth.
- When answering a call, members should wear the team shirt or uniform. If these are not available, the member is responsible for their appearance being in good taste. Every team member must display EMA ID Badges.
- When a call involves a death, members should assemble away from the crowd. Divers not directly involved with search and recovery efforts should remain assembled out of view and hearing of spectators and family.

**Horseplay and Misbehavior is not tolerated.  
Any report of this will result in an investigation and  
potential termination.**

- Always remember, the Dive Team is viewed by others as an elite force, and public expectations are high. The team's attitude, in most cases, will outperform the actual required duties. The searches are sometimes difficult, but the Dive Team behavior should never be less than absolutely professional.

### **Response:**

**Dispatch** - Most calls are received through Central Dispatch (911). Dispatch will notify the EMA office of any incident involving Columbia County waterways. During working hours, the EMA office will notify the Dive Chief and all volunteers needed for the incident to response. **The EMA Director will be immediately notified of all Dive calls.**

After normal working hours, weekends, and holidays, the 9-1-1 dispatcher will contact the EMA Director, who will advise on which personnel should be notified. Pagers and work numbers will be used during the day. Pagers and home numbers will be used at night. When called, the member will obtain directions to the site or designated staging area. Divers will take gear and other equipment that may be useful to the call.

The team will respond to the given location. If the call involves a death, the team may stage for the operation some distance away from the specific scene.

Team members will strictly adhere to prevailing traffic laws while en route and returning from a dive scene.

## **TYPES OF DIVE CALLS:**

**EMERGENCY** An incident that is considered to be an imminent danger to life.

**NON-EMERGENCY** An incident that involves the known recovery of victims or recovery of property.

**TRAINING** Planned diving exercises.

**EDUCATIONAL** Planned safety awareness events.

**Arrival** - Upon arrival to the scene, members will report to the Dive Chief, Training Chief, or Operations Supervisor, whichever is in charge of the scene, by order of seniority, and a Command Post will be established.

**Operations** - Search & Recovery Operations - Are performed only under the direction of the Director, Dive Chief, Training Chief or on-scene Dive Operations Supervisor. No one will be allowed to enter the water without specific instructions from Dive Command.

**Interview** - As soon as possible after arrival at the scene, Dive Supervisors should:

- Separate witnesses.
- Interview each one separately.
- Have witnesses take you to the same location that they had been when they last saw the victim.
- Identify the most probable location of the victim.

**Risk Assessment & Buddy Team Assignments** - The Incident Commander is responsible for buddy team assignments and risk assessment. Familiarization and assessment will be made with respect to the Dive Team members and the dive site. Assessment of divers will be via direct observation and direct interview and include behavioral and equipment considerations, experience, any significant medical considerations, and a general impression of the individuals psychological condition (stress levels). Environmental Assessment is made with respect to: Weather, Currents, Visibility, Bottom composition, Air temperature, Water temperature and Depth range. Only divers with specific "overhead environment" training and appropriate equipment may enter into a dive environment that does not allow for direct ascent to the surface.

The Risk/Benefit Factor is a subjective evaluation of the merits of an operation. **Safety is the number one priority in all activities.**

**S & R Operations for Divers** - Buddy teams will enter the water only at the direction of the Dive Chief or the Dive Operations Supervisor. Any diver may terminate any dive at any time for any reason or no reason. Dive flags will be displayed while divers are in the water.

## **Search Techniques:**

**Start at a known location, cover a known area, and exit at a known location.**

- Stay-Jack grid search pattern is the primary search technique
- Circle Search patterns are useful as a rapid response in some locations
- Other search techniques such as use of snorkelers in shallow areas, tethered shoreline, compass line, etc., may be used when deemed appropriate.

**Recall** - Underwater recall of divers is signaled with series of three quick tapping signals created by metal on metal contact underwater.

**Body Recovery** - Upon location of the victim, secure the body to the search line, take a quick view of the area for location of any personal articles and/or evidence, report to the surface and indicate "10-75" (in contact with). Divers will secure the body (in a stokes basket if conditions permit) and transport to shallow water or the boat. The body should be shielded from public view, covered at all possible times, and a "10-79" (call the Coroner) call should be issued. Prior to recovery of the S&R lines and equipment, a search of the area should be conducted and all personal articles and/or evidence should be recovered, secured, and marked. Removal of the body from the water is performed under the direction of the Coroner or the senior ranked Law Enforcement Officer on the scene.

## **S & R Operations for Boats:**

Everyone will wear a positive flotation device (Coast Guard Approved PFD or SCUBA with no weight system) while on any EMA or Dive Team controlled boat. The primary use of boats is as a surface transportation and surface support station for the divers.

- Boat motor operation within 100 feet of submerged divers is performed only under the Direct Supervision of a Dive Operations Supervisor.
- Boats will be set at anchor or be maneuvered with paddles as the needs of the divers dictate.
- Boats not involved in the S&R operation will not be allowed within 300 feet of divers in the water.

## **Mutual Aid Operations:**

Decisions concerning request for assistance from or to other Dive Teams outside of our jurisdiction will be made by the EMA Director or Deputy Director, in consultation with the Dive Chief.

**Written Reports:**

The Incident Commander be responsible for completing an “EMA Emergency Services Report”, outlining the operation in detail to document the incident. This report will be turned in to the EMA Director within 24 hours of the incident.

**Also, any boating accident that occurs, with our without injuries, will immediately be reported to the Georgia Department of Natural Resources.**